



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

February 3, 2006

News Release

PAIR FOUND GUILTY OF SMUGGLING CHARGES RELATED TO FATAL SIERRA VISTA ROLL-OVER CRASH

TUCSON - Two men could receive up to life in prison after being convicted here today on alien smuggling charges stemming from a fatal roll-over accident in Sierra Vista almost two years ago that claimed five lives.

The federal jury found Jose Luis Zepeda-Cruz, 25, of Mexico and Jimir Valle Martinez, 22, of Honduras, guilty of Conspiracy to Bring in and Transport Illegal Aliens, Bringing in Illegal Aliens for Commercial Advantage or Private Financial Gain, and Transporting Illegal Aliens Causing Serious Bodily Injury and Resulting in Death. The case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Arizona Department of Public Safety.

Martinez, the driver, and Zepeda-Cruz, the guide, along with two others, transported 34 illegal aliens into the United States. Julio Garcia (AKA Carlos Cortez), 30, of Mexico, Martinez' co-pilot, and Wilbert Garcia, 21, of Honduras, also a guide, have pleaded guilty on related charges.

"This is a just verdict that underscores a tragic border reality - smugglers care nothing for human life," said U.S. Attorney Paul K. Charlton. "Our thoughts remain with the survivors' families. We're grateful for the hard work by the Arizona Department of Public Safety and ICE on this case."

"The verdicts in this case send a loud and unmistakable message to human smugglers that they are going to pay dearly for their brutal disregard for their victims," said Roberto G. Medina, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Arizona. "Part of our enforcement strategy to combat human smuggling is to establish strong deterrents, and today's verdicts are a powerful one, indeed."

"The outstanding work of DPS officers on this case was instrumental in today's verdicts," said Roger Vanderpool, director of the Arizona Department of Public Safety. "DNA evidence collected at the scene, and processed in state labs, was key in the arrest and conviction of the driver responsible for these deaths."

The defendants were involved in a multi-car collision on the Buffalo Soldier Trail in Sierra Vista October 16, 2004. The crash occurred after Martinez lost control of a Ford pick-up truck and veered into oncoming traffic. There were 19 people in the pick-up, including ten in the truck's rear bed who were ejected during the crash. Three of the smuggled aliens died at the scene along with a local couple whose car was struck by the truck.

Martinez and Zepeda-Cruz are scheduled to be sentenced April 14, 2006. The defendants face a maximum sentence of life in prison on each of seven counts of Conspiracy to Bring in and Transport Illegal Aliens and Transporting Illegal Aliens Causing Serious Bodily Injury and Resulting in Death.

#ICE#

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.